

Star Announces Plans For 5 Local Editions

The Washington Star next month will initiate a project to transform the paper's coverage of local news by producing local editions to serve each of the five major communities of the Washington Metropolitan Area.

The new local news plan was announced today by Star Editor Murray J. Gart in a speech at the National Press Club.

In his first public address since assuming The Star's news and editorial leadership in June, Gart also pledged that The Star will speak with a firm independent journalistic voice to assure that Washington remains a strong two-newspaper town.

"There is no national capital on earth," he said, "more in need of more than one strong paper."

THE PROJECT "of large dimensions" to transform the paper's coverage of community news, Gart said, will be one of the paper's "principal preoccupations over the next few months."

While he withheld for the time being precise details of the new local news venture, Gart described the program in these terms:

"We will be launching local editions of The Star to serve each of the principal communities in the Washington Metropolitan Area. Each of the papers — five of them — will be dailies, and each will be an integral part of The Star.

"They will carry a full range of news. Start-up time is a date still to be selected next month, and all five will be operating by the end of November.

"We are currently engaged in reorganizing our staffs, picking editors, adding reporters and preparing local editorial offices.

"It has been my view for 29 years in journalism," Gart said, "that a newspaper must prove its real worth by the way it covers its home community life."

The Star, said the new editor, already is a "good newspaper — a lively, likable friend without too much in the way of fancy dress, manners, speech or other pretensions. I like it because I believe that in any other city in this country, including New York, it would be a strong competitor for the best papers published.

"What we do," Gart said, "we do well. And if you care, just watch! We are getting a lot better. There are so many things happening or soon to happen at The Star that it is difficult to keep up."

Barbara Jordan To Join Star Company Board

Rep. Barbara Jordan, D-Texas, who is retiring from Congress after three terms in the House, will join the board of directors of the Evening Star Newspaper Co., publisher of The Washington Star. She will take up her duties after the adjournment of the 95th Congress. Her election was announced by James R. Shepley, chairman of The Star's board and president of Time Inc., which acquired the newspaper earlier this year.

In making the announcement, Shepley stated: "I am delighted that Barbara Jordan will be joining the board of The Washington Star. Her exceptional contributions in public service are widely recognized. She will be a great asset to The Star in its continuing effort to better serve the Washington community."

IN A REFERENCE to the paper's recent acquisition as a corporate subsidiary of the giant publishing complex of Time Inc., Gart said the new owners "will not, as advertised, bring in platoons of Time Inc.ers from New York. I am the only immigrant from there on the editorial floor."

A former top-level editor of Time Magazine, Gart said: "My franchise here is not written down anywhere. I have no verbal orders that in any way restrict the editor or the independent voice of The Star."

Asserting that limited staff additions are contemplated, Gart noted that the paper already has recently hired specialists to bolster certain areas, among them Portfolio Section writer Judy Bachrach and sports columnists Tom Callahan and Jack Mann. Dave Smith, who will join The Star as sports editor next month, has produced "the best sports section in the country" in that capacity for The Boston Globe, Gart said.

He disclosed that three "talented editors" from the Miami Herald who view The Star as "the greatest challenge in American journalism today" also soon will be joining the paper.

ACKNOWLEDGING that The Star in recent years has settled into "second place in a field of two" in Washington, Gart said the paper got there and stayed there because its previous owners, proprietors and presidents "successively failed in their stewardship."

"They allowed the paper," he said, "to run down. In their desperation to keep it alive, they tried a lot of things. Even circulation was allowed to fall to save money. Yet for most of the troubled years, the paper's editorial voice remained strong."

In taking that retrospective look at the paper's recent history, Gart said, Time Inc.'s predecessor as owner, Joe L. Allbritton, had "served this community well by keeping the paper alive, and he passed on to Time Inc. a paper that could publish. It was his willingness to take a large risk to save the paper that gave it four years of life it might never have had."

During that period, Gart added, The Star also kept alive "its lively editorial tradition, thanks to Jim Bel-lows, the fine and ingenious editorial leader who preceded me, and thanks to a truly gallant staff."

The new Star editor also attacked what he called "a mistaken belief" among press people, in particular, that afternoon newspapers "simply cannot make it against morning competition" these days. His own "crash course" on the subject, Gart said, "gives me confidence to report that the belief is wrong."

Afternoon papers can "make it," he said, if they "provide sound journalistic service for readers in their community . . . but the key is having a good newspaper to provide the ingredients all too often missing in the afternoon papers that have folded."

That conviction is bolstered, Gart said, by research he has seen that shows the afternoon and evening — not the morning — is prime time for newspaper reading everywhere, Washington included. The new research data, Gart said, help brighten "the gloomy picture we once had. It is especially encouraging to a new editor trying to get a fix on the habits of the readers in his community."

THE STAR EDITOR also addressed a journalistic problem, especially in political news coverage, that he said he had been "running into ever since my arrival in June" — waves of criticism involving "how well and how wisely we use the power of the press."

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the fine line between fact and interpretation long ago disappeared in our profession and there is no longer much quarrel with that," Gatt declared. "But today, our critics say, the line between interpretation and opinion — yes, prejudice — is beginning to blur. That's the essence of the complaint. It is that we too often use our power unwisely or to abuse. The charge, of course, has a traditional ring, but I wonder if there is something more to it."

Since Watergate, Gatt said, "we do look much more carefully at every facet of the life of those who seek or attempt to hold public office. We are determined to know everything, or at least more than ever, and while we do not print it all — thank God — a great deal more detail of the private lives of public men and their families gets into public print. We are doing the work Watergate taught us we must, but the question is how well we are doing the job."

Some of the stories that all news people hear, if they listen, Gatt said, "suggest that not all of our critics are all wrong." He added:

"As an editor, the problem I see boils down to a greater awareness on our part of some of the dangers inherent in keeping a closer watch than ever on those who wield or wish to exercise public power. We certainly should not give up the watch. But we need to be more aware that our work takes us closer to that fine line between the public's right to know and some of the rights of privacy that even public men and women surely retain. In being fair-minded we choose the only honorable way in our work."